



Tom Lantos

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
RANKING DEMOCRATIC MEMBER**

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**FOR INFORMATION CALL:
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Verbatim - as delivered

Remarks on the House Floor by Tom Lantos Regarding H. Res. 557 on U.S. Troops Serving in Iraq

Mr. Speaker, the resolution we are considering today is deeply flawed. The way it was handled was meant to be divisive – and it has achieved that goal.

None of us in this House knows if next January we will have a Kerry Administration or a Bush Administration. But we do know that whoever is in the White House must ensure the success of U.S. policy in Iraq.

Success in time of war requires cohesion and unity. We do not need a divisive partisan resolution. This may be the way to prepare a Republican tax bill, but it is not the way to prepare a foreign policy resolution to win broad bipartisan support.

Mr. Speaker, the conflict in Iraq should not be a partisan issue.

The soldiers who are fighting in Iraq are Democrats and Republicans and independents. The soldiers who are wounded and killed in Iraq are Democrats and Republicans and independents. The families who grieve for their sons and daughters who died in Iraq are Democrats and Republicans and independents. The citizens of this country who are paying for this war are Democrats and Republicans and independents.

Mr. Speaker, it is totally unacceptable that not a single amendment to this resolution was made in order. This was a Republican resolution drafted with partisan intent by the Republican leadership.

Many of us in this House who have been committed to, and who have worked for, a bipartisan foreign policy for decades know that this is a slap in our face.

A resolution that commends our troops ought to receive the unanimous support in this body. But this resolution has been written specifically to prevent that result.

Mr. Speaker, war is a time for shared sacrifice. A time when we are all united in a common struggle. This is not shared sacrifice.

Some Americans are being killed. Some are being wounded. Some are asked to leave their families and risk their lives far from home. And some – at the very top of the income scale – are being asked only to accept massive tax cuts.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution commends the troops but it does not acknowledge the supreme sacrifice of many who are fighting.

This resolution makes no reference to the more than 550 American servicemen and women who have died in Iraq.

It makes no reference to the thousands more who have been wounded.

It offers no condolences to the families of those who have been killed.

It makes no reference to the sacrifices of the families whose members are away from them serving in Iraq for many months or over a year.

It makes no reference to the many civilian and humanitarian workers who risk their lives daily.

It makes no reference to the contribution of our allies who have thousands of troops in Iraq, and it makes no mention of the deaths and casualties they have suffered.

And it makes no reference to the Iraqi civilians who have lost their lives and suffered injuries – including dozens who were killed today.

Mr. Speaker, there are other serious omissions in this resolution. We should spend our time today debating substantive legislation to fix these problems.

The American people have not sent us here just to be an “amen chorus” for this Administration. There are serious problems and we should be debating serious solutions.

There is no mention in this resolution of the flawed intelligence that was the basis of the Administration’s argument for going to war in the first place.

We should be debating the establishment of a truly independent commission to examine the shortcomings of U.S. intelligence and the way it was used. The members of this commission must not be appointed solely by the President, and the commission should make its findings known before Election Day.

Only a truly independent investigation – and an investigation that the American people perceive to be independent – can bridge the credibility gap in our intelligence both here at home and abroad. The failure of this Congress to deal with the problems facing our intelligence agencies will ultimately harm our national security, the war against terrorism, and our fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Speaker, we are commending our troops, but we are not taking action that we can and should take to make their lives, and to make the lives of their loved ones, easier.

The sacrifices being made by our National Guard and Reservists in Iraq and elsewhere are extraordinary. Many National Guard and Reserve families have suffered serious financial losses because of the “pay gap” between their military pay when they are called up and their private sector pay. With longer rotations, Guard and Reserve families are facing dramatically increased financial burdens while their loved ones risk their lives far away from home. One of the consequences is a serious problem with re-enlistments in the Reservists and the National Guard.

My legislation – H.R. 1345, legislation that I introduced one year ago this week, Mr. Speaker – would fill that “pay gap.” My bill would ensure that government and private sector employees can continue to defend our country without being forced to worry about their families facing financial disaster.

Words of support for our troops ring hollow when substantive legislation to improve their conditions is sandbagged by the leadership on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, I very much regret that this resolution is being brought before this House today.

This should be a time for bipartisan unity and cohesion, not a time for partisanship.

This should be a time for us to deal substantively with serious problems we face in Iraq and in our foreign policy.

This should be a time for us to take serious action to help our servicemen and women.

All of us join in commending the brave men and women of our armed forces.

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